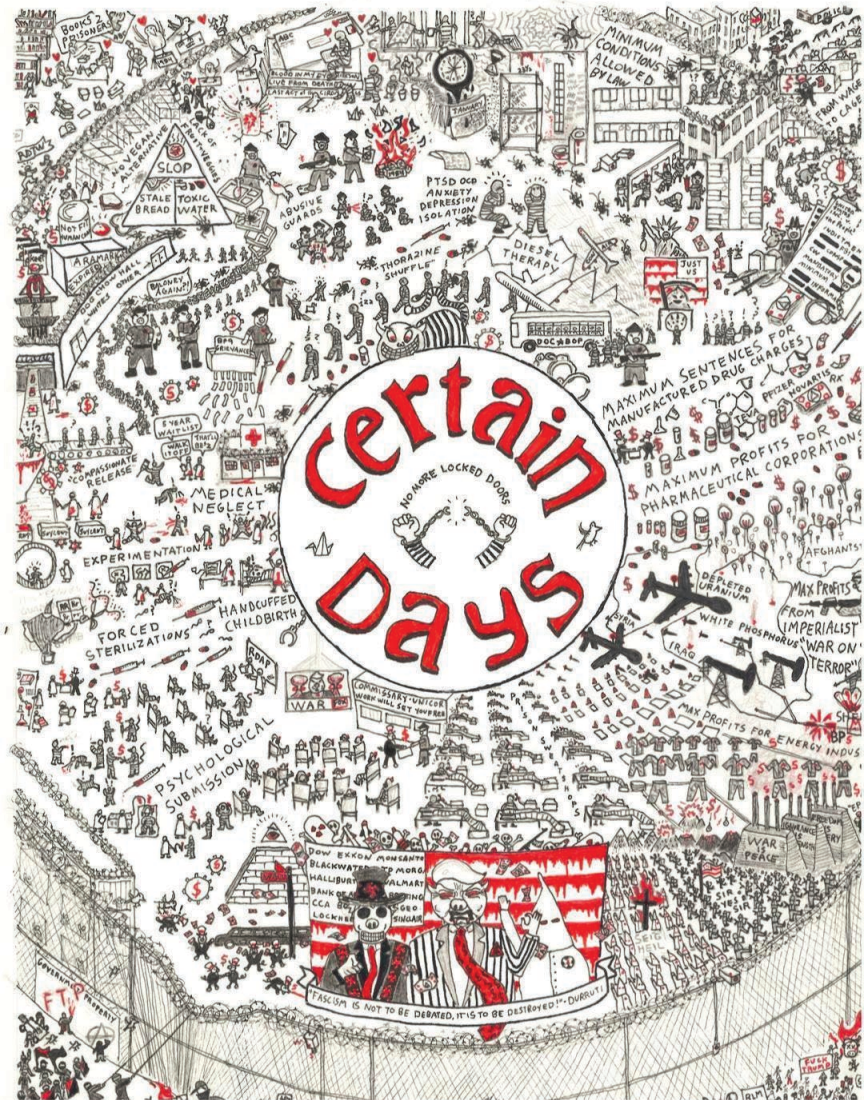


# 2024 CERTAIN DAYS CALENDAR



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - NOV 26, 2023

Longtime anarchist anti-prison activists Sara Falconer and Josh Davidson, organizers from the Certain Days Collective, talk on this years calendar, the creative and administrative processes involved in producing one of the most consistent projects in the abolition space, some updates on the incarcerated comrades they support and other topics.

You can learn more at [CertainDays.org](https://certaindays.org), find them on a bunch of social media platforms, and order calendars for deliver in Canada via **LeftWingBooks.Net** or in the USA via **Burning-Books.Com** and you can find our past conversations with Josh by searching Josh Davidson on our website, including a recent interview about *Rattling The Cages*.

Cover art by Jeremy Hammond, from a past year's calendar.

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

**TFSR:** Hello everyone, if you could please introduce yourselves, and tell us your pronouns, and talk a little bit about your organizing backgrounds and how you came to be involved with Certain Days.

**Sara:** Josh, why don't we put you on the spot first?

**Josh:** Sure. My name is Josh Davidson, he/him pronouns. I've been involved in the Certain Days Calendar Collective since about 2015 or so. I was invited by David Gilbert, one of the founding members in prison, and some of the other collective members. I've been involved ever since. I do a lot of other political prisoner work, including the children's art project with political prisoner Oso Blanco, where we take indigenous art and use that on greeting cards to raise money for the Zapatistas. I also work in communications with the Zinn Education Project.

**Sara:** I am Sara Falconer, she/her pronouns. I'm based in Hamilton, Ontario, the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. I grew up not far from here in the smaller city of Stratford, a wonderful community in so many ways, but I had a lot to learn. So, in high school, a teacher introduced us to the family of Deadly George, an indigenous protester who was killed by police. That was almost 30 years ago now, I guess. It really opened my eyes. So, in the early 2000s, when I moved to Montreal, which had a huge and vibrant anarchist community at the time, I became involved with people that were doing solidarity work. I started writing to prisoners. I became involved in this wonderful group that had started the Certain Days Calendar around then. At first, I was just distributing calendars with my partner, but I soon became involved in the collective and actually creating this beautiful thing. So that's been well over 20 years now, which is amazing.

**TFSR:** Can you give a brief overview and maybe a little brief history of what the Certain Days project is and maybe talk a little bit about how it has changed or even stayed the same since its inception?

**Josh:** Absolutely. So, the Certain Days Freedom for Political Prisoners Calendar is a joint fundraising and educational project between outside organizers across North America and political prisoners in prison. Currently, the incarcerated member within the collective is named Xinachtli. He's in prison in Texas, where he's been held in solitary confinement for decades now. The calendar was created over 20 years ago by three New York State political prisoners: Herman Bell, Seth Hayes, and David Gilbert, all of whom have been released as of 2018.

Sara, do you want to add more about the history of the calendar?

**Sara:** Yeah, absolutely. Josh, you gave a great overview. Herman Bell, who was a Black liberation prisoner, had been visiting with supporters from Montreal at the time, and it was his idea to create the calendar. It was a way to keep prisoners in front of people every day, 365 days a year. Here are prisoners on your wall, a way

to learn about our history, even as we continue to shape it. Josh you will laugh, because he said it to you I'm sure many times. He always said to me, "Anyone who doesn't have a Certain Days calendar on their wall at home or at work is a square." It's a major insult from Herman Bell, if you do not have one of these calendars, is that you are a square. I think it really just grew from there.

David and Seth were involved for many years in shaping the project. So many people contributed, including organizing members in New York, Baltimore, now we've got Minneapolis, and so many others across Canada and the States. That's a really interesting thing about the calendar to me too, is it's just kind of like cross border project, in addition to being across generations, in addition to being across movements. I can't let the history go by without mentioning our dear friend, Daniel McGowan, friend of this show, who is, I understand, obsessed with Rush, and not so secretly wants to be a Canadian. So, between all of us, we have a lot of fun. We build this thing, and it's just been wonderful to see it grow. There are people that come in and out of the project over the years in such a wonderful way. It's just amazing to me that it's still going, and it feels like it's gonna keep going.

**TFSR: It strikes me as the kind of project where the folks who leave it don't tend to stray too far from it.**

**Sara:** You're so right. It's a collective that's quite small, and it takes a lot of work. In fact, I took a bit of a step back in the past couple of years because I had to focus on family, and during COVID things were really challenging, too. So, to be able to have that flexibility to take a bit of a step back, but still be so passionate about it and still involved, and to still keep building it. I really value that, and I love people that will step up to take on what they can in the meantime too, so that we can come in and out of it where we see fit.

Josh, like, you've seen people coming in and out of the project. You were such a wonderful infusion of energy when you came in too. So, I wonder if you have any reflections on that.

**Josh:** Yeah, it has really been interesting to watch it grow just in the seven or eight years that I've been involved. It's been really amazing to watch our founding insight collective members come home. I think that's something that I never expected to see. So, I'm so glad that they're outside fighting with us today. I think that's a major change that we've seen. But also, just to see new people join the collective, to see how people who were so intimately involved stay connected and stay involved in whatever capacity that they can, it's really breathtaking, and it's really amazing to see and to be a part of.

**TFSR: I'm really interested in the level of consistency you all have managed year on year. Can you discuss the assembly process, the writing process? I'm assuming it goes on kind of an annual schedule. Can you tell me a little bit about how that works?**

**Josh:** You're right, it's on an annual schedule. It's kind of a full-time job. We joke about that, but it's very true. There's a small group of us doing it, and we do spend a lot of time making it happen. That starts really before the new year. The calendar is available to purchase now, but we're already thinking about what to do for the 2025 calendar and how that process begins. It's a really long process that includes sending a call out, which gets people to send in artwork and essays that we then have to select and go through and pick out. Of the many that are submitted, we have to pick out only 12 pieces of art and essays, so that in itself is a difficult process.

**Sara:** I think because communication to prisoners takes such a long time and has so many barriers, the call out has to go very soon for content. So, we're in the midst of a high-pressure time right now. There's only so many months that people think about buying a calendar, to those people that still think about buying a calendar, and it's now. So, we are really working to get the calendar to stores and distributors and groups and to people who love the project.

At the same time, if we aren't thinking about next year's calendar, as a collective, if we aren't getting in front of the prisoners who might send us our articles next year, they won't have time to get it to us, and they won't have time to navigate all of the repressive conditions that they're under in terms of communication, too. So, this is what's happening now. I'm sure the collective is thinking about what the next theme is going to be and how to get it out there.

In the spring, you're gathering those submissions, seeing where there's gaps in terms of representation, in terms of what they want to see as a vision. Then really soon after that, production is happening, copy edits, layout, chasing people down for high-res images. I'll give another shout out to Daniel on that one because he was so good at it. All of that so that the calendar can get to print and be in our hands in the fall. Then it just goes and goes and goes.

It's not a perfect process. I think at certain points, it can feel very frustrating. Then every year the calendar comes out, and it's just this miracle when you're holding it in your hand. Josh, you feel this, right? Like "We made this! It happened! We're gonna do another one!" It's like childbirth, where you just get that amnesia.

**Josh:** Absolutely. I'll just add that it's nice to hear that you see the consistency over the years in the calendars because every year we do try to update it and improve it in different ways. Whether that's including photos of books instead of writing books out, adding more dates. We're constantly changing dates. We were actually contemplating now including the call out in the calendar itself, so that every person that gets a calendar automatically is aware of how and when to submit something. So, we're constantly thinking about new ways to improve it.

**TFSR:** Can you talk a little bit about the call out process as it exists now? Maybe talk about the selection process. I'm not sure if the contributors are prompted in any way. Are you looking for representation? Are you looking for timeliness?

**Josh:** Yeah, we're looking for all of that. I think that the call out process in itself has changed over the years. When I joined, we had a theme each year, a specific theme, which was considered and analyzed by collective members inside and out. Essays and artwork were supposed to relate to that theme. In the last two years, I believe, we haven't had a theme, and it's been a bit more open. That process has had its in and out, its ups and downs. But like Sara said, it's a never ending process to get things to people inside, while those who are incarcerating them are doing everything possible to prevent anything from getting to them. So that's something that we're constantly working against.

**Sara:** You know that firsthand, Josh, because of this amazing book that you've recently released, *Rattling the Cages*, that the challenges of trying to raise those voices and the importance of helping to break down those barriers. I think that's one of the most important things we can do as outside organizers is to find spaces to bring those voices into our everyday work and to allow them to be part of what's happening in our current movements. So, I think, the calendar for the time that I've been involved with that it has always prioritized prisoner artists and writers. At the same time, we can't fill a whole calendar with that work, and we get wonderful submissions from people who are supporters for people from different movements who are interested in supporting the cause. So, it's such a cool combination of both prisoners and outside supporters in terms of the collaborators.

**TFSR: How do you navigate the tension between emergent or urgent issues and speaking to the bigger picture, the long-term concerns of abolition?**

**Sara:** I would say in a way... It's also a depressing answer, but we are still dealing with many of the same issues that I was looking at when we started the calendar, that the prisoners that we work with were tackling in their communities when they were imprisoned. The current issues and the issues we've been dealing with for 20 years plus and beyond, they're still connected. So more than a tension, I think it's about drawing continuity across the struggles. Colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, repression in inside and outside of prison, something as vital and current right now as the Palestinian struggle. There's never been a calendar that didn't focus on that in every single issue of the calendar, as it always will be. I think that it's almost like a thread running through things to be able to show the history of the struggle that we're in the midst of.

**Josh:** Yeah, that's beautifully said. I think the calendar does a great job of that, of showing that the struggle is the same. These battles and our tactics might change over the years, but it's all the same struggle against imperialism and against all the things that Sara mentioned before.

**TFSR: Speaking to your comment about continuity, can you talk about how involved the founding members are in the production process and the proj-**

**ect in general? Can you say a little bit about the intergenerational nature of abolition organizing, both in and out of incarceration? That was one of the things that struck me, was the transmission of information, of radical ideas across generations.**

**Josh:** Yeah, that's a great question. I'm looking at a photo right now of Sara, Daniel, and I with David Gilbert when we visited him in New York state prison. I think it's fair to say that this calendar grew out of that intergenerational dialogue that happened between supporters and political prisoners 25 years ago. That conversation is still happening today. I think we're growing and learning along with them.

Like I said before, it's amazing to see our founding members outside, to be working with them on the outside. I'm gonna see David in a few weeks in person, which will be the first time I've ever seen him not behind prison walls. It's an ever-growing and ever-evolving process, but it's great to be a part of that with people who have been involved in struggle for so many decades.

**Sara:** I agree. 100% on that. From its inception, intergenerational relationships have been core to the project. I was in my 20s at the time, and I'm hella old now. It was formative for me, in my early years as an activist, just being in direct contact with people from the Civil Rights Movement, from the Black Panthers, from the American Indian Movement, from Direct Action in Canada, from student groups and organizations around the world. It's a tether to me to the reality of our struggles and to how we can be part of still creating that better world that they were working towards. To me, it keeps it very tangible. It keeps me going in the hard times. I hope that we can bring that excitement about this work to new people who join us. I see a lot of growing awareness and interest in recent years around some of these issues.

I want the calendar to be a resource to them. I think it's so important to bring people along with us. I see the value in all of that. How wonderful to have been able to meet and talk to them and write to them. You know, these voices that could have been lost while they were in prison, and then to be able to see David, Herman, and Seth while he was still alive. He was quite close to us in Buffalo. To be able to spend time with them like that, I feel so lucky to have that connection to people that still want to help make the world a better place.

**Josh:** Yeah, absolutely. Just to add to that, what Sara's already mentioned, this calendar, it's also a catalyst for other projects and for us to learn and grow in other ways. It helps, in part, to lead to this book that Sara helped us create called *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners*, which is due out in December with AK Press. It's really a conversation, the same as the calendar, between people inside and outside. I interviewed about 40 current or former political prisoners about how they survived and what they learned in prison. Sara wrote a really beautiful introduction, Angela Davis, wrote a foreword. It's a great book, and I can't wait for people to read it and for all sorts of people to learn to learn about the calendar through it.

**Sara:** No pressure at all having to write something that Angela Davis appears in the page before you. I'm so proud, and I'm just so excited, I think to be able to raise those voices in such a cool way, the book is beautiful. I think it's going to bring a lot more people into this work, which is so cool, Josh.

**TFSR:** In line with the goals of *Certain Days*, for the upcoming publication of *Rattling the Cages*, can you say a little bit more about putting that book together? Also, could you give an update on the upcoming release of Eric King?

**Josh:** Sure. So, this project, it started as a COVID project. Eric and I were reading a book together, and he came up with the idea of writing to political prisoners to find out what they learned in prison, how they survived, and what they see as far as the future of struggle for our movements.

For those unaware, Eric King is an antifascist political prisoner. He has been doing 10 years in some of the roughest prisons, in solitary confinement, across America for a non-violent act of protest after the police killing of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, MO. Eric is due to be released from prison from the ADX prison, which is the strictest, most secure prison in the US. He is due to be released in February 2024. He is eligible to go to a halfway house now, but they do seem to be keeping him as long as humanly possible. But from this cage, where he has been held, incommunicado from everyone, he came up with this idea, and we reached out to as many people as possible. We really got some amazing and beautiful responses.

**TFSR:** Thank you very much. So along the lines of both of those projects, I know that they are maybe not necessarily competing priorities, but maybe overlapping ones. How do you think about in terms of these projects bringing new people into the movement versus demonstrating solidarity with those already in it? Like what would constitute a success along those lines?

**Sara:** I think this is an interesting one. I've seen so much change in recent years in the way we can talk about these issues with the so-called general public, From horrible moments that have happened in the states like the murder of George Floyd, to the police brutality against houseless people here in Canada every day, I think more people are just seeing how broken it all is. I think ACAB is hot on TikTok, and it should be. I think there's a space right now to have these conversations about what abolition looks like, about it being this key line of history that's not just starting now. I like to see the calendar and the book is resources, so that as people are learning more that they can come into that.

I think also it's good timing for it because a lot of people in our movements are quite burnt out. This is a fucked up and hard time to be organizing. I can't go without mentioning just how hard it's been to organize around the Palestinian struggle. In that space, where I'm talking about how people seem like they've come

further along with us and then these conversations in recent weeks have been so difficult in the communities. I realized we're not doing a good enough job of being out there and doing education and making connections. So this is a rambling way of saying, I feel hope, but it's hard.

**TFSR:** So, you mentioned that people are latching on to some of these ideas, but as they latch on to radical ideas, I think a lot of people are going to have to drop some old ideas. So, one of the essays that really struck me was the one from Pink Block Montreal. So, my question is, drag defense has become a new front in the wider project of community defense. I was struck by the comment in Pink Block Montreal's essay in which they stress the priority of holding their radical position among liberals, where they might be tasked with doing community defenses and such at a drag event or something like that. As abolition enters the mainstream discourse, how do you think abolitionists will best bring people to a radical position, rather than having that position be diluted?

**Sara:** I love that piece in the calendar. If I'm remembering correctly, I think I first saw it on North Shore Counter Info, which is a really great source of local information in Canada, and they share international news too. It really moved me.

In Hamilton, we've at times recently been outnumbered by anti-trans and anti-drag protesters, which can be quite demoralizing. But I see people showing up time after time. And as new people come in, I kind of want to meet them where they are. If somebody feels like they have an interest in being involved, but aren't quite sure about direct action, I don't think you start at direct action. I certainly didn't come from a small community. With the values that I knew, I don't think I would have understood how important it was to stand up and to take risks for the things that we're doing now. I think that's okay. I think people come into it where they are. I think that's why it's important for us to try and give space for people to develop that awareness and to give space for education and multiple perspectives along the way.

That said, I don't think that we need to let people block us from doing the stuff that's more active, and feeling confident in direct action and the important things that needs to happen right now. So, it's striking that balance, really, between understanding that there's going to be new people that may not understand all of the tactics and not letting tactics be a thing that divides us.

**Josh:** Just to add to that, I think the calendar does that well by focusing on education rather than being antagonistic toward liberals or such. I think by focusing on education, we're focusing on this hidden history that you're not going to find in other calendars, that you're not going to find in most places. The dates that are throughout our calendar have been submitted to us by people who've done decades in prison or from books that are out of print that have obscure prison uprisings and things like that. So, it's things that you're not going to find elsewhere. I

think the calendar does a good job of providing an opening, no matter what level of political consciousness you're at.

**Sara:** I agree. I learn something from it every single year. Even doing the editing and pieces that we do. I always am like, "Wow, that's so interesting, I didn't realize I was connected to this other thing. I didn't realize it was on this day." I just absolutely love that. I think, because of our wonderful artists and authors that contribute, you can get pulled in by just how gorgeous it is. Who doesn't want this hopeful thing on the wall?

Years ago, we made a bit of a design decision that we would feature art that felt in terms of color, or tone, mostly hopeful, because we have to look at it for a whole month. So, you can definitely do political art that's quite intense, or quite negative, and it's really important, but we try to still have something that is inspirational. If you're not all the way there, you don't have to be. You can put up the calendar and be like, "This is a nice-looking calendar." And then there's a lot of stuff to think about over the next 12 months.

**Josh:** In that sense, the calendars really don't age, you can pick up a calendar from 2010 and learn just as much as you would from picking up one today. I think that's also something that's beautiful about the project itself.

**TFSR:** To hear you describe it, the project and the calendar itself have sort of been on the ascent since the beginning, in terms of you know, technical production and different qualities and honing the message and so forth. What would constitute a leveling up for Certain Days? What are your ambitions for the project in the short term and the long term?

**Josh:** There's a lot there. I think I can speak for Daniel when I say that we'd like to sell about a million copies a year. But it is, as we said, very laborious, and there's only a handful of us putting this out every year. Sara, what do you think?

**Sara:** I think sustainability. There have been times where we looked at ourselves and said, "Do people still want a paper calendar?" Given the fact that I have my calendar in my hand all the time. The truth is, yes. For people that want something beautiful on the wall, for people that want something that's like a little slower or more thoughtful about the way that they engage with the calendar.

I know people that still do it. I don't write in the calendar because I keep all my like dates in my phone. That's just like how I engage with my day to day. But to me, it still is so wonderful to wake up every day and look at it, see what the occasion was, see what might have happened that could inspire me. Just something tangible is still so cool. I still see a great deal of interest in it, and I think through word of mouth and through people who have supported us, it can continue to grow. I recognize that it's at a size is now that sustainability is kind of the key. So, a level up really is like 10 years from now, do we still have a paper calendar? I think that'll be

pretty fun.

**Josh:** Yeah. Yeah, agreed.

**TFSR:** For my last question. The goal of abolition is obviously a very big goal, very important goal. I imagine it might seem perpetually out of reach at times. So, do you find that you're able to claim small or incremental victories in this fight? If so, what are those? What keeps you going?

**Josh:** I think, one, just getting the calendar into people in prison is an accomplishment in and of itself and knowing that people inside will learn and will share it with others inside. Sara, what do you think?

**Sara:** I think you pointed out earlier, Josh, the releases of prisoners that we've worked with for the past decades, that is so encouraging. And it's the work of people who have put so much blood, sweat, and tears into these campaigns, into continuing to support them, into never letting those names be forgotten. So, I think the fact that people still continue to be released, that we can still put pressure on it, whether it's for release or for better medical conditions, or for whatever we need to do to keep pushing things forward. I think that that is amazing.

Repression is always tied to the work that we're doing. It's tied to the fear that we're winning, that we're taking positive steps. The situation in Canada is different, but repression is still ongoing here. Just last night here in Ontario, there were activist raided in their homes related to solidarity for Gaza. It's terrifying, its bullshit, and we need to keep standing up and to keep raising these voices to let people know that they're not forgotten, whether they're in jail or in prison. I think that goes for activists across all of our movements, whether they've been in for the horrible decades that some of these folks have, or whether they're just like new in this system, to let them know that there is a movement out here that is not going to let them be forgotten and not going to let it happen. I think that that, to me, feels like something that we can keep striving for.

**TFSR:** Thank you both so much for the work that you did on this and for taking the time to talk to me. I really appreciate it.

**Josh:** Thank you.

**Sara:** Thank you. This was great.

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